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ABSTRACT

This paper traces the historical development of melodrama in the theatre and discusses its influence on twentieth century drama. Melodrama is a responsible literary mode based on romance and allegory, and its deliberate exaggeration of external actions represents figuratively the interior or psychological dimensions of imagination. Good melodrama portrays life experienced at its moral and emotional peak and arranges action into one of these basic patterns: love-threat-survival or love-threat-demise-repose. The paper discusses the specific use of melodrama in dramatically significant plays by Tennessee Williams, Luigi Pirandello, Anton Chekhov, Bertolt Brecht, and other modern playwrights. (MAI)

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# G A S P S , G U F F A W S , & T E A R S :

## AN APOLOGY FOR MELODRAMA

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I saw my Lady weepe,
And sorrow proud to be advanced so
In those fair eies, where all perfections keepe,
Hir face was full of woe
But such a woe . . . as wins more hearts . . . .

DOWLAND

Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

TENNYSON

The sorry verities!
Yet in excess, continual,
There is cure of sorrow.

STEVENS

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Nothing is so easy to spoof as melodrama--heightened emotion verbally expressed. When Candide "discovers" Cunegonde's brother in South America,

> Bothe fall over backwards, embrace, and pour out
> floods of tears.[1]

Similarly, Jane Austen can describe two questionably sensitive women as having "fainted Alternately on a Sofa."[2] Nor is this a new development; from time immemorial we have had with us the emotionally excessive thrust--the paratragoedia of the Batrachomyomachia or of the Petronian Satyricon. John Donne can imagine two lovers, when they part, on the verge of "tear-floods" and "sigh-tempests."[3] And Fielding can raise up emotion terribly--for a put-down:

> MESSENGER: Oh! monstrous, dreadful, terrible, Oh! Oh!
> Deaf be my ears, for ever blind my eyes!
> Dumb be my tongue! feet lame! all senses lost!
> Howl wolves, grunt bears, hiss snakes, shriek all
> ye ghosts!
>
> KING: What does the blockhead mean?
>
> MESSENGER: I mean, my liege,
> Only to grace my tale with decent horror.[4]

Melodrama, let us admit it, is excessive--a sitting duck. Yet is is also the essence of much that is crucial to our lives. Melodrama is normally considered by critics to be laugh-making, heedless, dissipated, extreme.

The most difficult ideas to consider, in any cultural milieu, are precisely those ideas that we take for granted; they are the donnée, the assumed portion of our lives--and the unexamined. In this sense, such concepts are "gaps" in our system of thinking, lacunae in our understanding. One recollects

that for centuries the Ptolemaic questions are why and how the universe revolved around the earth; this, of course, led to "adjustments," to an ever more complicated series of contrived epicycles and regulated quaverings in our construction of astrographical maps. It was only with the Copernican question, does the sun and the universe revolve around the earth at all? that we commenced to get anywhere.

In dealing with literature, we almost automatically assume that "the Pun is the lowest form of wit"; that Epic and Tragedy are "high" and "grand" modes, whereas Comedy and Satire are comparatively "low"; that we can certifiably establish the "influence" of one author upon his successor; that Melodrama and Sentimentality--any mode of literary excess--are "immature," "ridiculous," "gross," and "second-rate." In the present paper, I would like to reconsider this last supposition and take a hard second look at Melodrama, hopefully posing some Copernican questions. Most of my concluding examples will be drawn from major twentieth-century drama, a wealthy mineral vein purportedly "purged" and "purified" of all the baser metals.

-i.-

Perhaps there is no more appropriate place to begin, than by directing the examiner's eye and the prosecutor's queries upon myself. It is a commonplace expectation of the average broadly-educated man (certainly it is my own expectation) that I ought to be unmoved by excessive emotions, that I should not succumb with laughter to the dissipations of slap-stick or shed a tear at maudlin sentimental scenes. I am your average "intellectual," and must muster "aesthetic disinterestedness"; I am your typical Nordic, and must Take Hold Of Myself; I am your grown-up, and must Act My Age.

--All the more's the vexation, therefore, when I discover with chagrin that I don't. Much of the trivia and drivel of the Marx Brothers' cavortings secretly tickle me, in spite of my mind. The saccharine conclusion of cinema's "The Sound of Music" (with welling Clim-Every-Mountain lyrics and grand Alpine technicolored vistas) induces a knot in my throat, in despite of my principles. The conclusion of Heller's Catch-22 veers from satire sharply to the north, promising Yossarian "escape" and "sanctuary" in Sweden, or Karen Black (violating Nathanael West's book) in John Shlesinger's "Day of the Locust," wistfully revisiting Tod Hackett's bare apartment at the fade-out, discovers a single flower, tucked within a ragged crevice of the wall--why do such sentimental scenes force from my tightened and guilty eye a single, grudging tear? Why indeed?

Why do I recollect Bette Davis and her roles with something like enmity? Why do I succumb to a kind of mind's-eye swagger after viewing a Bogart or Cagney film on the Late Night Movie, surrender to a kind of nostalgia when I witness the aged Edgar Bergen and his Charlie McCarthy return to television for a guest appearance? Why is all America suffering from a craze for period pieces, '30's radio broadcasts, Swing music, "Nicholodeon," any past recaptured, any campfire, and any "camp"?

The dichotomy--one might almost say schizophrenia--between our intellect and our emotions is complete. Indeed, the divisions between the head and the heart in the twentieth century might well be properly designated the real Two Cultures. And we may well ask what served to develop the penchant for a cold, dispassionate aloofness in the mind, and so-called studied "tastes." Owing to many causes, the twentieth century commenced on a note of, in Matthew Arnold's phrase, "high seriousness." Zola and "scientific" naturalism called for grim verisimilitude;[5] upper-middle-class Victorian gentlemen favored "gentility";

and Mr. Eliot and the New Critics called for a studied "impersonality" and aloofness in treating of the literary work[6]--as did the symbolistes and imagists, relying upon presentation rather than emotional exposition or assertion. Beside Naturalism stood the movement favoring Realism; as Mary McCarthy has observed: "Realism, historically, is associated with two relatively modern inventions, i.e., with journalism and with photography."[7]

After 1880, the establishment of the so-called Free Theatres (the Independent Theatre in London, the Théâtre Libre in Paris, the Freie Bühne in Berlin, and the Moscow Art Theatre) added spirit to the growth of little theatres developing throughout Europe, and established drama outside the patented, licensed "legitimate" theatres. These theatres fostered a sense of experimentalism and encouraged the new "naturalism" and "realism." As Stanislavski recalls:

> The founding of our new Moscow Art and Popular Theatre was in the nature of a revolution. We protested against the customary manner of acting, against theatricality, against bathos, against declamation, against overacting, against the bad manner of production, against the habitual scenery, against the star system which spoiled the ensemble, against the light and farcical repertoire which was being cultivated on the Russian Stage at that time.[8]

Indeed, William Archer, translator and early champion of Ibsen in England, in his history of English Drama (1923) detects, after Shakespeare, a dubious and spurious "line" of "Passion" in drama (as opposed to the more delicate "line of Imitation"[9]), consisting in "rhetoric" and "rant," "bombast and "fustian"; such a Line of Passion prevailed from Elizabethan times until a renaissance in 1893, with the appearance of Pinero's The Second Mrs. Tanqueray (p. 510). For the rest, Archer perceives Elizabethan dramas generally as a "ruck" of "melodramas" (p. 100), Lillo as producing "prose melodrama" (p. 233),

and most of the work of the nineteenth century (including that by Oscar Wilde, p. 304) as little else. And, even though Archer believed the plays of Eugene Scribe to be exceptions to this excessive emotional trend, later analysts have even added Scribe to the heap:

> The trivial melodrama and thesis plays of the heirs and followers of Scribe reduced drama to an art of facile moralizing and superficial entertainment.[10]

By such standards, virtually any extravagance upon the stage--over a period of some three hundred years--is taken as a sign of "melodrama," and decried. At this point, it will be well for us to pause and consider what actual Melodrama is.

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Toward the close of the eighteenth century, mélodrame was a term in France borrowed from the Italian, and used to refer to an increasingly popular dramatic form that utilized a spoken recitation accompanied by music, the music being employed to express the speaker's emotions.[11] This sub-genre was quickly understood to be most effective in expressing the strongest emotions, and in creating "atmosphere." In subsequent experiments upon the popular French stage, the situations and settings from the Gothic novel and from Schiller were heavily relied upon. Because of the music and the exotic scenes, vast spectacular stage props were regularly employed, and dialogue--often stichomythic and breathless--kept to a minimum, the managers increasingly employing rapidity of action, swift changes of scene, sensational gesture, and even series of sign-boards spelling out the characters' crucial dramatic sentences. Melodrama immediately became the delight of the masses in Post-Revolutionary Paris, where René Charles Guilbert de Pixerécourt wrote innumerable pieces and helped to

shape the genre that later spread to Germany, England and America. Plots and characters became stereotyped, as they so often do in any popular genre, and characters of the villain, the endangered innocent maid, the suffering elderly family, the handsome put-upon youth, and the side-kick comedian were developed and made hard-and-fast. Violence, thrill, stage-business, suspense, and murder became so much the staple of Paris's Boulevard du Temple, the street set apart for such theatres, that it was shortly renamed the Boulevard du Crime.[12] Thereafter, such drama developed a vigorous life in Europe as the best-loved dramatic form, and continued as such throughout the nineteenth century.[13]

Now, there is no doubt but that such dramas harp upon the emotions, that they overplay scenic extravaganza, are fast-paced, action-packed, episodic, cater to the exotic and sensational. For melodrama complacently parades a series of brazen attributes: ". . . its charlatanry and opportunism, its hardihood and catholicity, its vulgarity and naiveté . . ."[14] As a matter of fact, a good argument can be made, showing that Melodrama violates almost every single one of Aristotle's principles for tragedy laid down in the Poetics; for melodrama stresses not Plot or Character, but Spectacle, Diction, and Song; there is no hamartia or flaw in the typical innocent protagonist; its plots depend not upon probability and necessity, but upon chance,[15] coincidence, and the deus ex machina. Assuredly, the melodramatic plot is, by Aristotelian standards, most untragic. There is, generally, a single unfolding plot-line: a common or middle-class (but pure and immaculate) hero or heroine settled with a happy family and a sincere and handsome fiancée or wife is beset by some black villain or implacable mischance that threatens blackmail, foreclosure, debtor's prison, robbery, rape, or murder. Numerous episodes. Sighs, bombast, rapid

evasions, direst sobs and plaints. Mounting tensions, turns and tergiversations, rising suspense. Just when all hope is virtually abandoned, the plot may turn in one of two directions: Most commonly,

> 1) The villain is "foiled" (or even converted), destiny is diverted, and all is happiness and repose;

or (and this occurs far less frequently)

> 2) The villain brutally triumphs or accident proves fatal, and we are left at the close with the funeral, with tears, and quiet grief.[16]

Settings vary; the protagonist might be a pirate, an American slave, a Turkish captain, an Irish peasant, or the victim of an Italian count, but the plot normally unwinds in one of two directions: the hero or his beloved is foully destroyed, or they are saved "in the nick of time." Such plots, by the standards of the Poetics, overstress either pity or fear, creating an imbalance. Worst of all, melodrama employs precisely those plots which Aristotle had dismissed as unsuitable to tragedy:

> . . . it is clear that one must not show fitting [or moderate] men changing from good fortune to bad, for this is neither frightful nor pitiable, but disgusting; nor wicked men [changing] from bad fortune to God, for this is the most untragic of all, since it has nothing of what is necessary, for it is neither humane nor pitiable nor frightening; nor again must a very wicked person suddenly change from good fortune to bad . . .; for such a plot would be humane, but neither pitiable nor fearful, for pity is aroused by the unfortunate man who is undeserving [of his misfortune], and fear is aroused by the man like ourselves . . . , so that the result will be neither pitiable nor fearful.[17]

--Small wonder that "classicists" and reserved modern scientific sensibilities have professed to be scandalized by the proceedings of melodrama. And to be sure, after the first tidal wave of Romanticism began receding, there was a prompt reaction against such sensuous excitation of the emotions. George Henry Lewes, in the 1850's, reviewing Dion Boucicault's The Corsican Brothers, protested:

> The tendency of the senses is downwards. To gratify them stimulants must be added and added, chili upon cayenne, butchery upon murder . . . And herein lies the secret weakness and inevitable failure of Melodrama . . . that [it] appeals to the lowest faculties, the avenues to which are very limited . . . .[18]

Thereafter, Lewes went on to predict that melodrama would exhaust itself, and die away.

Yet this is exactly what melodrama did not do. Not only did it proliferate zestfully, toward the close of the nineteenth century, in newer media--on the Chautauqua circuit, in vaudeville, in the music hall, in burlesque, but in our own century, with the development of cinema, radio, and TV, melodrama has reigned supreme in spanking new forms: the soap opera, the domestic-family series, the western, the detective story, the horror show, the science fiction adventure.[19] The modern critical Head has scarcely known what the acclaiming Heart has been at. Only most recently, in 1969, a national society, the Popular Culture Association, was founded to foster the scholarly analysis of such thriving public phenomena.

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Nevertheless, this form is still too seldom taken seriously as art?[20] For, in spite of all its successes and its wide dissemination, melodrama habitually continues to be treated with opprobrium, considered a "bastard" form, one

pasted and patched up out of the "impurities" and leftovers of tragedy and other literary kinds. And the worst charge against it is, simply, that it is lacking in meaning, in profundity. As one critic has observed,

> . . . it is a form of literature that has made no significant statement about the nature of man or the world in which he lives. [21]

I am not al all certain that any form of literature makes a "statement," but I do wish to suggest several ways in which melodramatic form is meaningful.

It ought to be clear, first of all, that melodrama is a distilled form of the broader mode of Romance and Allegory;[22] its insistence upon external actions, as in these broader forms, is suggestive, figuratively, of the inner life, of psychological initiation. By its deliberate exaggerations, melodrama portrays or figures forth the mind's interior life: "Melodrama is the Naturalism of the dream life," as Eric Bentley has remarked.[23] Its gestures, intensifications, and hyperbole confront us with the world of nightmare and of dream, and these, as Freud has told us, constitute elemental wish fulfillment at the two farthest poles--of Life (Eros), or of Death (Thanatos). Such exorbitant trials and passions (for the homme moyen sensuel) exercise our imaginations at the uttermost boundaries of potentiality and possibility. Such violence. amplification, and hyperenhancement are only to be faulted if they fail (as they do in all second-class, impoverished art) to picture forth actual inspiration, actual feeling. But that melodrama which does dramatize and realize the Manichaean polar opposites of Love and Death, Goodness and Evil, is a substantive artistic achievement.

It is little wonder that melodrama came of age in the Romantic Period, when celebrants of the imagination sought to reach to the very doorsill of

Heaven and of Hell,[24] and that such melodrama has continued to thrive and to say something tangible to proletarian and middle class, industrialized mass man, whose daily life is all to frequently lacking a bona fide spiritual and sentient emotional dimension. Such literature at its best offers not "escape" from reality, but an honest-to-God journeying through the whole of Reality, including in its transit the superego and the id.[25] All of life (and particularly imaginative life) consists in these basic patterns--Love-Threat-and-Survival or Love-Threat-Demise-and-Repose. The most insightful art sparks for a moment the fusion of these two patterns into one, creating for an instant Unity and Monism. Melodrama at its best exemplifies what Yeats's Crazy Jane overtly asserts:

> "Fair and foul are near of kin,
> And fair needs foul," [she] cried.
> . . . . . .
> "[Since] Love has pitched his mansion in
> The place of excrement;
> For nothing can be sole or whole
> That has not been rent."[26]

-ii.-

Only lately have examinations of melodrama begun to plumb its artistic meanings and potentiality.[27] Furthermore, recent studies have commenced to perceive the importance of melodramatic techniques as being regularly employed by our major novelists--Balzac, Dostoevsky, Dickens, Henry James. It should prove challenging, therefore, for me to urge that melodramatic strategies have

*continued in our best plays, in the very modern drama that William Archer* called purified and the "new." Indeed, since theatre is of necessity "theatrical," we might especially expect to perceive in it melodramatic grandiosity, spectacle; the lugubricus, the histrionic, the hugger-mugger. If anything, twentieth-century "movements" in the theatre increasingly display such potential excess. Realism added a touch of the sombre and the power of coarse everyda. stichomythic dialogue. Symbolism and Expressionism added the signs and mechanisms of the dreamlike, the nightmarish, and the grotesque. And the Theatre of the Absurd has revived new elements of the frantic and the fantastic--bizarre injections of the vaudevillean, manic doses of stock characters and the vapid cliché, motiveless persecutions, guiltless guilts, criminal inanities, accidental fates.

Let us single out a few illustrative, memorable features from plays of our contemporary theatre. First of all, it ought to be remarked that innumerable plays have forcefully utilized the sheer "machinery" of melodrama. Tennessee Williams' The Glass Menagerie, for instance, is a "memory play," complete with filtering gauze transparent curtains, projected screen images, title cards, and thematic music. Georg Büchner's influential Woyzeck (first staged in 1913) employs staccato, episodic scene changes, together with foreboding atmosphere signals: superstitious fears, a carnival and circus barker, performing horse, an idiot, feverish dancing, a monomaniacal scientist performing an experiment upon a human guinea pig,[29] recurring allusions to moon, blood, knives. As in a nightmare, most of the characters are often confused in their speech; and a grandmother recites for a group of children what has to be the most diabolic fairy story ever told.[30] Pirandello's Henry IV is glamorous with rich costumes of the twelfth century, a sumptuous throne room,

a twenty-year-long love affair, a mysterious fall from a horse, and the slow unfolding of mystery and hidden identity. Still, all of this color and dash is curiously perverted by an infernal series of plays-within-plays, by perpetual "masking," and ambivalence concerning the protagonist's real and pretended madness. Strindberg's Ghost Sonata presents an austere symbolic mansion, roaming ghosts, an insane wife sequestered in a small room, and the assemblage of characters who have for years been concealing their perfidious crimes; they are gathered at a time when all crimes will be "revealed" to the light of day; also featured is a beautiful heroine who is mysteriously dying in a hot-house atmosphere of hatred and vice. And Harold Pinter's The Birthday Party reveals the overly-dominant mother-figure, a shy, retiring protagonist, and the vaudeville-team/gangster-type duo who come to "get" him, after throwing a "party." At the actual party, fights commence, the stage is plunged in darkness, and the audience merely hears the mechanical beating upon a toy drum.

Moreover, modern theatre is full of heightened, emotionally-charged scenes and speeches so familiar to nineteenth-century melodrama: a chanting chorus in Max Frisch's Beidermann und die Brandstifter, chillingly foretelling the destruction of the city by fire (together with flickering lighting effects suggestive of flames and the incessant wailing of sirens); the town meeting in Duerrenmatt's The Visit, wherein the entire male populace resoundingly intones and recites an "oath" calling for the purification of their guilt by the sacrifice of a scapegoat (so that they might "honestly" obtain one billion marks). The demonic voice of the traditional nineteenth-century villain and hypocrite marches through this play like the barbarian hordes. Similarly, in Ionesco's La Cantatrice chauve, there is the memorable but interminable scene of discussion,

wherein Mr. and Mrs. Martin at length discover in a cognitio that they are man and wife; only after prolonged and tedious inquiry does the scene conclude with the traditional "discovery" and embrace: "Elizabeth, I have found you again!" and "Donald, it's you, darling!"[31]

Another familiar stage scene transpires in Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman when Linda, the wife, defends her misunderstood and ailing husband in ringing, virtuous tones:

> "I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person."[32]

Similarly, in a sensational climax in Ibsen's Rosmersholm, Rebecca and Rosmer conclude that they have "sinned" and must "atone"; hastily sealing a pact of love/death, the two rush away to plunge from the bridge down in the garden. "For now we two are one," Rosmer heatedly confirms. And the maid looks on in terror from the house: "Oh . . . over the side . . . both of them! Into the millstream! Help! Help!"[33] But, of course, it is too late. In like manner, a typical melodramatic scene is enacted in Brecht's music-drama, Mutter Courage und Ihre Kinder. When enemy troops threaten to surprise the sleeping city of Halle, the mute daughter Catherine climbs upon a farmhouse roof and commences beating a drum, in an attempt to waken and warn the unsuspecting townspeople.

She is subsequently shot--but at that instant alarm-bells and cannon sound from the city; in the nick of time, the people have been saved! And finally, in doubtless one of the great comic, noisy, and climactic scenes in modern drama, after a shot has been heard offstage, Chekhov's Uncle Vanya rushes upon the set at the close of Act III in a fit of despairing and envious fury. He is flourishing a pistol, and attempts almost at point blank to shoot the superior Professor Serebryakov. Pandæmonium. The women scream and almost faint. Vanya fires--and misses. With flamboyant and futile misery, he collapses and abandons one more enterprise. Tableau: the women continue frantically shouting and gesturing. Curtain.

--So much for the pomps and pantings, the pities and pathos of modern melodramatic creation.

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Perhaps no one among modern playwrights has been more blatantly anti-melodramatic than G. B. Shaw. His Devil's Disciple (1897) was deliberately entitled "A Melodrama." He was, baldly, spoofing conventional melodrama and its trite conventions; the play does not, he tells us, "contain a single even passably novel incident"; all of the tired strategies are shamelessly revisited:

> . . . the reading of the will, the oppressed
> orphan finding a protector, the arrest, the
> heroic sacrifice, the court martial, the scaf-
> fold, the reprieve at the last moment . . . ."[34]

Even the protagonist's name, Dick Dudgeon (vid. "high dudgeon"), suggests a superboy from the penny-dreadful or the adventure comic strip. Nevertheless, for all of this parodying, Shaw's play is still itself the purest melodrama: Dick Dudgeon is the unmannerly atheist--who yet cannot bear to see a woman

weeping; he can rant and declaim--and yet be saved; he is able to be as obnoxious as possible--and yet induce a handsome woman to fall in love with him, and he transforms Pastor Anderson into a man. The townspeople are cautious about starting the American Revolution and detest Dudgeon to a man--and yet they are won over to rebellion against the British and to honoring Dudgeon at the last. Even the enemy, General Burgoyne, forthrightly concedes admiration. The challenges of happenstance are met with swashbuckling bravado that rivals the dangers of Cyrano de Bergerac or The Three Musketeers, and overcome. Definitely, melodrama is simultaneously mocked and emulated in this play; as is so often the case in Shaw, he has his cake and eats it too. These are the dinner and dessert of his plays.[35]

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Can we, therefore, confidently claim that melodrama is a recent--and short-lived--dramatic aberration? No; the truth is, that the theatre (and a civilization's literature, for that matter), never did present us merely with a cool and classic "slice of life." What we typically get is a fraction of life lived at its peak, morally and emotionally--a Romanticist's dream of excess, climax, violence, and purgation. Still, many a critic, such as Irving Babbitt, remains skeptical:

> Nothing is easier than to establish the connection between emotional romanticism and the prodigious efflorescence of melodrama, the irresponsible quest for thrills, that has marked the past century.[36]

Yet melodrama upon the stage has been responsible, has been thrilling. Melodrama in the plays I have glanced at has been symbolically and dramatically significant. Despite the torrents and extravagances and perversities of melodrama, we are well served when she is in the house. And we have all the more need for dramatic excess in an intellectual period that questions or represses or eschews emotion. But, be that as it may, one fact is clear: in the last ninety years we have witnessed one of the greatest eras of the theatre in world history. We certainly need to scrutinize drama--and its components--so unflaggingly in this period, because great theatre has been so obviously in our midst.

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA J O H N R. C L A R K

F O O T N O T E S

[1]"Il se laissent tomber tous deux a la renverse, ils s'embrassent, ils versent des risseaux de larmes," Voltaire, Candide, Chap. 14.

[2]Love and Friendship, Letter 7th, LLaura to Marrianne.

[3]"A Valediction: Forebidding Mourning," line 6. Consider Shakespeare's hapless Nick Bottom as an actor:

"But stay, O spite!
But mark, poor knight,
What dreadful dole is here!

. . . . . .

Approach, ye Furies fell!
O Fates, come, come,
Cut thread and thrum:
Quail, crush, conclude, and quell!"

A Midsummer-Night's Dream, V.i. 267-69, 275-78.

[4]Henry Fielding, Tom Thumb, III.x. 14-19.

[5]I am thinking, of course, of Émile Zola's materialism, empirical scientism, and determinism, programatically called for in "Naturalism in the Theatre" (1879) and The Experimental Novel (1880).

[6]"The progress of an artist," T.S. Eliot asserts, "is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality . . . It is in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science" (Tradition and the Individual Talent" [1919], Selected Essays [New York, 1950], p. 7). And Douglas Bush has complained that, "However valuable the processes and results of the new criticism, for some readers its preoccupation with technique, its aloof intellectuality, its fear of emotion and action, its avoidance of moral

values, its dislike of 'impure' poetry. . . , all this suggests the dangers of a timid aestheticism" ("The New Criticism: Some Old-Fashioned Queries," PMLA, 64 [1949], 20). And Robert Langbaume observes that the fashionable use of the term "persona" in recent criticism implies that "the critics are saying that literature is or ought to be impersonal" (The Modern Spirit: Essays on the Continuity of Nineteenth-and Twentieth-Century Literature [New York, 1970], p. 164). Bertolt Brecht seeks a similar "distancing" of his audience from the actions upon the stage by fostering his Verfremdungseffekte, or "alienation-effect."

[7]"The American Realist Playwrights," On The Contrary (New York, 1951),p. 295.

[8]Constantin Stanislavski, My Life In Art, trans. J. J. Robbins (New York, 1956), p. 330.

[9]The Old Drama and the New (Boston, 1923), p. 170. Subsequent page references to this book are included within parentheses in the body of my text.

[10]Haskell M. Block and Robert G. Shedd, "General Introduction," Masters of Modern Drama, ed. Block & Shedd (New York, 1962, p. 3. Indeed, "popularity" and "entertainment" are still cuss words for those who continue to rail against mass culture's "subversion" of art. "The same writer, indeed the same book or even the same chapter, may contain elements of both Masscult and High Culture. In Balzac, for instance, the most acute psychological analysis and social observation is bewilderingly interlarded with the cheapest, flimsiest kind of melodrama. In Dickens, superb comedy alternates with bathetic sentimentality, great descriptive prose with the most vulgar kind of theatricality" (Dwight MacDonald, "Masscult & Midcult," Against the American Grain [New York, 1962], p. 7).

[11]Rousseau alternated dramatic monologue with pantomime and orchestral musci in his Pygmalion (1770); consult Peter Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess (New Haven, 1976), p. 14 n. 14, p. 87 n. 14; and James L. Smith, Melodrama (London, 1973), pp. 1-2.

[12]See Frank Rahill, The World of Melodrama (University Park, Penn., 1967), p. 16, and Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination, p. 34 and n. 7.

[13]In addition to Rahill's The World of Melodrama (which alone attempts to deal with melodrama in France, England and America), see Henri Beaulieu, Les Théâtres du Boulevard du Crime (Paris, 1905); Michael R. Booth, English Melodrama (London, 1965); M. Willson Disher, Melodrama: Plots That Thrilled (London, 1954); Paul Ginisty, Le Mélodrame (Paris, 1910); David Grimstead, Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture, 1800-1850 (Chicago, 1968); and Alexander Lacey, Pixérecourt and the French Romantic Drama (Toronto, 1928). A brief survey of the genre's history (with emphasis upon England) may be found in Willson Disher's article, "Melodrama," in The Oxford Companion to the Theatre, ed. Phyllis Hartnoll, 3rd ed. (London, 1967), pp. 631-34.

[14]Frank Rahill, "Melodrama," Theatre Arts Monthly, 16 (April 1932), 285.

[15]"Chance" and "coincidence" and "accident" tend to play a considerable role in melodrama, where a split second in timing can mean the difference between a freedman and a corpse. Perhaps, for that very reason, melodramatic dénouements may prove the more shocking. The chorus in Jean Anouilh's Antigone stresses this point: tragedy is fated, absolute, unavoidable, and therefore restful, because destiny is wholly known. "It has nothing to do with melodrama--with wicked villains, persecuted maidens, avengers, sudden revelations and eleventh-hour repentances. Death, in a melodrama, is really horrible because it is never

inevitable" ("Antigone," trans. Lewis Galantière, in "Antigone" and "Eurydice" [London, 1951], pp. 34-35).

[16]The same author might well write pairs of works, one following the pattern of type I, the other of type II; consider Euripides' Iphigenia in Aulis and Hippolytus; Shakespeare's A Winter's Tale and Romeo and Juliet; Richardson's Pamela and Clarissa.

[17]Aristotle, Poetics 1452b-1453a [translation my own].

[18](London) Leader, Feb. 28, 1852, p. 209. Lewes designates this tradition in the theatre the "Fast" or the "Material School"; for an extended discussion of his opinions about "decaying" melodrama, consult Edgar W. Hirshberg, George Henry Lewes (New York, 1970), pp. 173-79.

[19]Needless to say, melodrama was uniquely suited for the silent screen, and for motion pictures in general. See A. Nicholas Vardac, Stage to Screen: Theatrical Method from Garrick to Griffith (Cambridge, Mass., 1949), Ch. II, "The Melodrama: Cinematic Conceptions and Screen Techniques," and Ch. VIII, "Melodrama: The Photoplay, 1902-1913," pp. 20-67, 180-98.

[20]Robert B. Heilman, for example, has always been "concerned" about what he terms melodrama's "external complications" and "accidental discoveries" as being too mechanical, too "superficial" (see Cleanth Brooks and Robert B. Heilman, Understanding Drama [New York, 1948], pp. 64-65, 246-48, 314-15). In his very able essay, "Tragedy and Melodrama: Speculations on Generic Form," Texas Quarterly, 3 (Summer 1960), 36-50 (later developed in his book-length study, Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of Experience [Seattle, 1968]), Heilman postulates that tragedy deals with a protagonist's internal "dividedness," which

subsequently leads him, internally, to character growth and new perception; melodrama, on the other hand, is undivided, monopathic, without a growth in understanding. Consequently, for all of his interest in melodrama, he finds it, in comparison with tragedy, obtaining "power," but lacking in "range" and "depth" and "complication." I suspect that there is too much oversimplification here--and I am not at all certain that most tragic heroes mature or definitely grow in comprehension.

[21]James S. Bost, "Foreward" to William Paul Steele, The Character of Melodrama: An Examination Through Dion Boucicault's "The Poor of New York" including a text of the play (Orono, Maine, 1968), p. IV.

[22]The broad mythic "mode" of Romance rehearses the trials of a young hero (or heroine), until he is initiated into maturity; see, for instance, Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (New York, 1956), pp. 35-37, passim, on the "Monomyth"; Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, 1957), pp. 186-206; Edwin Honig, Dark Conceit: The Making of Allegory (New York, 1959); and Angus Fletcher, Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode (Ithaca, New York, 1964).

[23]"Melodrama," The Life of Drama (New York, 1964), p. 205.

[24]Rahill, in The World of Melodrama, Ch. IX & X, remarks the influence of "romanticism" upon melodrama after 1830; prior to that time, Rahill contends, most melodramas ended routinely, with "virtue rewarded." In fact, of course plays predating melodrama, by Schiller, Kotzebue, d'Arnaud, together with several plays during its initial period (1798-1830), did conclude with death or mishap for the protagonist. Nevertheless, the Romantic concern with a "sublime" that included the "horrible" exerts a considerable influence; see Mario Praz,

esp. "The Metamorphoses of Satan," The Romantic Agony, trans. Angus Davidson [1933] (New York, 1956), pp. 51-91, and Northrop Frye's discussion of the demon lover in A Study of English Romanticism (New York, 1968), pp. 51 ff., as well as Peter L. Thorslev, Jr., The Byronic Hero (Minneapolis, 1962). The archetype for the integration of the two poles is, to be sure, Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.

[25]In an interesting passage, Peter Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination, esp. pp. 201-202, suggests that melodrama is analogous to psychoanalysis; both confront the id and attempt to strengthen the ego. James L. Rosenberg goes one step further; he insists that melodrama is vitally important because of its whole-hearted theatricality, which is the soul of theatre. "The function of the drama--of all art--is surely to put us in contact with the abnormal, the unusual, the extraordinary, perhaps to exhort us to aspire toward these peaks of unusualness ourselves, at least to make us more sensitive toward their occasional irruption into the dull and featureless normality of our own daily existence" (James L. Rosenberg, "Melodrama," The Context and Craft of Drama: Critical Essays on the Nature of Drama and Theatre, ed. Robert W. Corrigan & James L. Rosenberg [San Francisco, 1964], p. 184).

[26]"Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop," lines 7-8, 15-18, The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (New York, 1952), pp. 254-55.

[27]See esp. the fine essays by Eric Bentley in The Life of Drama, James L. Rosenberg, "Melodrama," in The Context and Craft of Drama, and Peter Brooks, "The Melodramatic Imagination," Partisan Review, 39 (Spring 1972), 195-212.

[28]Consult Jacques Barzun, "Henry James, Melodramatist," The Question of

Henry James, ed. F. W. Dupee (New York, 1945), pp. 254-66, Leo B. Levy, Versions of Melodrama: A Study of the Fiction and Drama of Henry James, 1865-1897 (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1957), Peter Brooks, The Melodramatic Imagination (on Balzac and James), Donald Fanger, Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: A Study of Dostoevsky in Relation to Balzac, Dickens, and Gogol (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), and particularly Wylie Sypher, "Aesthetic of Revolution: The Marxist Melodrama," Kenyon Review, X (Summer 1948), 431-44. This last essay conceives of the whole of the nineteenth century, in idea and in style, as being bipolar, concerned with extremes; he includes in his discussion Maccauley, Carlyle, Hugo, Browning, Dickens, concluding with an examination of Marx's Capital.

[29]For three months, Woyzeck has been restricted to a diet of peas.

[30]"Once upon a time, there was a poor little child with no father and no mother. Everything was dead, and no one was left in the whole world. Everything was dead, and the child went and cried day and night. And since nobody was left on the earth, he wanted to go up to the heavens, 'cause the moon was looking at him so friendly, and when he finally got to the moon, the moon was a piece of rotten wood, and then he went to the sun, and when he got there, the sun was a wilted sunflower, and when he got to the stars, they were little golden flies stuck up there like the shrike sticks them on the blackthorn; and when he wanted to go back down to the earth, the earth was an upset pot, and the child was all alone, and he sat down and cried, and there he sits to this day . . . " (Woyzeck, trans. Henry J. Schmidt [New York, 1969], pp. 50-51).

[31]Eugène Ionesco, Four Plays, trans. Donald M. Allen (New York, 1958), pp. 18-19.

[32]Arthur Miller's Collected Plays (New York, 1957), p. 162.

[33]An Enemy of the People, The Wild Duck, Rosmersholm, trans. James Walter McFarlane (New York, 1961), p. 381.

[34]"Preface," Three Plays for Puritans (New York, 1906), p. xxiii.

[35]A good many of Shaw's plays are, in fact, blatant melodramas. Shaw had originally undertaken to write The Devil's Disciple for the manager of the Adelphi, the theatre that had for decades been the stronghold of popular melodrama. Consult Martin Meisel, Shaw and the Nineteenth-Century Theater (Princeton, 1963), Ch. 8, "Melodrama," pp. 184-223.

[36]Rousseau and Romanticism [1919] (New York, 1955), p. 154.